

Evaluation of Honduran Forestry Cooperatives: Five Case Studies

Jones, Michael
Honduras 1999-2003
Michigan Technological University – Forestry

Case studies were done on five Honduran agroforestry cooperatives. A comparative analysis of the five case studies was utilized to determine the factors most important for success or failure of a cooperative. The case studies yielded eleven focus areas of importance: forest resource base, land tenure, structure and functionality, benefits for cooperative members and communities, institutional support, international aid projects, pine bark beetle, resin tapping, logging, processing and marketing of timber, and integration of logging and resin tapping.

The quality of forest resource base possessed by a cooperative was found to have little influence on success in the cooperatives studied. Land tenure was determined to be of utmost importance for the survival of cooperatives. Two factors, obtaining initial tenure rights, and defending those rights, were identified as most critical. Under structure and functionality, groups with better participation and communication between cooperative members enjoyed the most success. Boards of Trustees were found to function inadequately in some study groups, which is an area for improvement. Benefits received by cooperative members and communities from the cooperatives were defined as incentives for cooperative development. Institutional support for cooperatives by government entities was found to be inadequate in many cases, and a general distrust of important government entities was noted within the cooperatives. The positive and negative aspects of participation by cooperatives with international aid projects were discussed. Planning and participation were identified as areas for improvement for the projects. Recent forest losses due to pine bark beetle infestations will have profound effects on some cooperatives. Various threats to continuance of resin tapping were identified including silvicultural methods, exhaustion of tree plots, and poor market conditions. Diversification of cooperatives into logging, log processing, and lumber marketing were shown to cause difficulties for cooperatives. Introduction of logging without full participation by cooperative members caused division within some groups.

Operating logistics and management skills presented challenges for the cooperatives, and are both areas that can be addressed with increased training and interchange between cooperatives. Resin tapping does not appear to be feasible in the long term without logging to remove trees that can no longer be tapped. Therefore, integration of resin tapping and logging activities was argued to be of paramount importance for long-term sustainability of the cooperatives. New management systems are needed which optimize production of both products, rather than timber only.